

**May 12, 2020**  
**U.S. SENATOR TOM UDALL**  
**REMARKS FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF THE M.H. DUTCH SALMON GREATER GILA WILD AND SCENIC**  
**RIVERS ACT**

Thank you all for joining us today.

And a special thanks to Commissioner Chris Ponce and small business owner Jamie Crockett for speaking today and for their tireless work to protect the Gila.

During times like these, the importance of preserving our outdoor treasures—and the joy, peace and beauty they give us—could not be clearer.

That's why Senator Heinrich and I are proud to introduce the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. This bill would designate 446 miles of the Gila river, and other rivers in the Gila and San Francisco water basins, as Wild and Scenic.

This legislation is a ray of hope – a chance to look forward to a time when together we can enjoy the beauty and opportunities that the Gila offers to our communities.

We are hard at work on relief efforts for New Mexicans who are facing down the health and economic pain caused by the coronavirus. At the same time, we are moving forward with this process, because the Gila is one of the last wild, free flowing rivers in the Southwest – and we must do all we can to protect it.

This legislation is the product of a years-long effort, and I am so grateful for the many diverse voices who have been involved. We began this effort with draft legislation, developed in concert with community members, private landowners, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, local officials, farmers and ranchers, and more.

We opened up that draft to additional feedback to make sure New Mexicans have a seat at the table in helping determine the future of the Gila.

We've been working closely with private landowners and agencies to identify where the designation boundaries should be.

Using the diverse feedback we've received –we have now introduced a strong piece of legislation that will protect the Gila while ensuring that existing uses and planned projects – including grazing, recreation, restoration, and access – can continue.

We undertook this process to ensure New Mexicans were heard, fully. And we have worked hard to listen to every voice and to craft a piece of consensus legislation that reflects the majority of New Mexicans' views.

There is broad public support for protecting the Gila, and the outcome of our work is a bill that reflects the voices of our local communities and their important connections to this special place.

We are now moving forward with this improved bill that will bolster the local outdoor economy, protect the beauty and wildlife of this rich area, and enhance water quality.

The Gila watershed is the most biologically diverse in our state: home to 14 native fish, including four that are not found anywhere else in the world.

Bobcat, cougar, mule deer, black bear, the gray fox, and other species roam the Wilderness that provides refuge for some of the greatest bird diversity in the country.

And, for thousands of years, the rivers and streams in the area sustained Indigenous communities.

It's no surprise, then, that the Gila is one of New Mexico's most popular outdoor destinations, drawing birders, hikers, rafters, kayakers, fishers, hunters to its immense natural grandeur.

Outdoor recreation in New Mexico generates over \$9.9 billion dollars annually. That's an extremely important source of revenue for local economies that will be crucial to jumpstarting our economy.

Like so many New Mexicans, I've had the great joy of spending time on the Gila. Camping along the river. Sleeping under the stars. Experiencing the rejuvenation and invigoration that this river has provided to generations of New Mexicans.

To ensure our communities and future generations can enjoy and benefit from the Gila like we have – we need to act to protect it.

This is personal for me. More than 50 years ago, my Dad, Stewart Udall, helped shepherd the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act through Congress.

I'm so proud to continue his work today.

For my dad, this work was about balance, common sense, and leaving a legacy for our children, grandchildren, and beyond. That is the spirit we carry forward today.

Wild and scenic designation is reserved for our most special rivers and streams. By any measure, the Gila is one of New Mexico's most special rivers. And by any measure, the Gila is worth protecting for our children, grandchildren, and all generations to come.

With that, I will hand it over to my great partner in this effort, Senator Heinrich.